



# The Counseling Center News

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## TCC NEWS

Our sincere wishes for joy filled holidays to all of you. We hope some of the articles in this issue will support you in pursuit of enjoyable family times.

The Counseling Center is a source of help and support for those dealing with difficult issues at this time of year. Winter offers a time for quiet and contemplation, so this can be a great time to pursue personal growth and resolution of old issues. We will also have some new offerings beginning this winter and into the new year. Gayle Bohlman will be offering a Winter Retreat Day for women, date and location to be selected. Email us if you are interested.

We will have expanded office space at TCC in the new year, and hope to offer a yoga class on site, and to initiate some new group offerings for personal growth. We will post dates and details soon.

Please see News on page 2

## Stress Reduction Strategies

*By Linda Beam*

As we approach our solstice that marks the beginning of the winter season, we find ourselves adapting to shorter days with less light, colder temperatures, and the stress of the holiday season. These stressors point toward a need for understanding the stress cycle and learning to embrace some stress reduction strategies.

The stress response is initiated when we perceive an event as dangerous. Stress begins with our thoughts. What one person perceives as a danger or an unpleasant situation another person may perceive as a challenge or an exciting situation. When we perceive an event as dangerous or threatening, we begin to think negatively and trigger emotions such as fear, sadness, remorse, jealousy, anger, etc. The brain responds with the first stage of the stress response, *the alarm reaction*, also known as flight or fight. A variety of chemicals are released into the bloodstream to allow a momentary boost for survival. Our muscles tense, stomach clenches, breathing and perspiration increases, and our eyes dilate. The body is ready for physical activity, the same mechanism that allowed our ancestors to fight off an enemy, or run from a tiger.

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## CBT Corner – Part 2

*By Jim Gach*

In the June issue I went over some of the basic tenants of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT). As a quick review, we generate our emotions based on what we are telling ourselves about a situation instead of the situation causing our emotions. This is very liberating as it places us fully in charge of our own emotions and relieves us of being at the mercy of others.

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*The goal in CBT is to appropriately modulate emotions rather than to try to shut them off.*

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In the first part of this article I described in some detail how we generate some of those emotions. The goal in CBT is to appropriately modulate emotions rather than to try to shut them off. Imagine that your emotions are a series of dimmer switches or volume controls (several can be on at the same time at varying degrees of volume or brightness).

If we looked at the Anger control it would progress from a very low level (annoyed, peeved, perturbed, irritated, frustrated) to a moderate level (angry, mad, agitated, aggravated) to the higher levels (livid, enraged, explosive and at the top - homicidal). Annoyed to homicidal - same emotion: the first so low it is barely audible and the later at max distortion.

The internal language we use to escalate the emotional response is to tell ourselves that something is HORRIBLE, AWFUL, TERRIBLE or that we CAN'T STAND IT. These words act as escalators that increase the intensity of our response. Our body does not slow down and say, "Are you sure this is really horrible or terrible? Might it just be annoying or inconvenient?" The people who did that got eliminated from the gene pool! You see this tendency to overreact serves us very well when we are in a war zone, or the jungle, or anywhere that there are things that will kill us.

Please see *CBT* on page 4

*News from page 1*

Terry McGeehan is available for couples seeking mediation to resolve family conflicts. This can be a very peaceful way to pursue resolution of differences. Our newest practitioner, Linda Beam, offers expertise in stress management, and is also a resource for families dealing with substance abuse issues. See her article in this edition. Wayne King offers special expertise in working with traumatic events, and is very effective in using these skills with children. Please call us for help with these and other problems.

## Holidays for Families after Divorce

By Terry McGeehan, LCPC

Holidays are typically thought of as a time of tradition, family gatherings, celebration and creating fond memories. For families who have experienced loss through divorce, they can be a time of great sadness and depression. Remembering the good times from the past and creating positive experiences in the present can support children and families in healing the loss and renewing the meaning and joy of the holidays.

Remembering the past for the positive experiences and relationships it held can lay the foundation for new growth. Allowing children to express their feelings about the past, about the changes in their lives is important. Be an active listener for your children and **just listen** without trying to “fix” their experience. As a parent, you can talk about the traditions and relationships the family continues to experience rather than who is not with them or what is missing. Your children will follow your lead.

Following divorce, the children may spend part of a holiday with Mom’s family and part of the holiday with Dad’s family. Embracing the idea that the holiday season and the celebration are the focus and not the particular day on which this occurs will set the tone for positive experiences. If one parent is no longer a part of your children’s lives, you can focus on the relationships they continue to have and the traditions they continue to celebrate. It is helpful to create new traditions and rituals which will become “normal” for the new family constellation.

Finances are often a concern when two households now exist where there once was one. Feelings of guilt about not being able to provide the kind of celebrations the family experienced in the past will not serve parents well. No one wishes for a divorce. Forgive mistakes that were made and focus on what is now possible. A loving relationship between parent and children is more valuable and more enduring than any material possession from a store. Focus on the relationships and the time spent together as the real gift of the season. Change is an inevitable part of life, supporting children to accept the changes as neither good nor bad while embracing what is consistent over time will give them the stability they need.

### *Stress Reduction* from page 1

If the cause of the stress is removed, we are able to return to a state of balance. If the stress continues without proper rest, we move to a second stage, **resistance or adaptation**. Here the body’s defense mechanisms are challenged and overused, possibly leading to high blood pressure, fatigue, lapses of concentration, mood swings, and illness.

Prolonged periods of stress lead to the third stage, **exhaustion**. Here our immune system is compromised, adrenals are depleted, and disease occurs. Stress becomes chronic and self-care has been abandoned. We may find ourselves feeling lethargic and suffering from insomnia, depression, and other disorders.

When we remind ourselves of the importance of returning to a state of inner balance on a daily basis, we can avoid allowing chronic stress to take hold of us. Each day do something that is enjoyable and calming for you: listening to music, reading, meditation, painting, journaling, dancing or exercise. Keep a present focus, and slow down your pace. Notice the beauty of the natural world around you. Drink water regularly to stay hydrated and carry healthy snacks. Create a cue word, phrase, or image that is calming to you and repeat it throughout the day. Remind yourself to tune into your breathing, as the breath is our body’s perfect stress reducer. Also, most importantly, maintain a sense of humor.

*CBT from page2*

However, our spouse forgetting our birthday or anniversary hardly qualifies at the extreme levels but if we tell ourselves that this is terrible we will react at a very high level. So what are we supposed to do, not respond? No, we do need to respond to things that we find annoying or perturbing but at a much lower level. So if we say to ourselves, "This is really frustrating and I wish that he/she would remember my birthday," we will likely speak up and let them know without exploding and driving them away.

In review, to avoid overreacting, avoid the use of escalator words such as, Horrible, Awful, Terrible, and I can't stand it. Instead substitute lower level verbiage such as, Annoying, Frustrating, or I don't like it but I can stand it.

Next column - Tyranny of the Shoulds.

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We continue to have a positive response to our newsletters and invite you to continue to dialogue with us. We appreciate your feedback.

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